



American Enterprise Institute

Keynote Address by UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman: UK-US Security
Priorities for the 21st Century

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Yuval Levin, Beth and Ravenel Curry Chair, AEI

Keynote Address:

Suella Braverman, UK Secretary of State for the Home Department

Discussion

Participants:

Suella Braverman, UK Secretary of State for the Home Department

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Q&A

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Yuval Levin: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the American Enterprise Institute. I'm Yuval Levin, of AEI. And it's my pleasure to welcome you to an address by Britain's Home Secretary, Suella Braverman.

Like the United States and much of Europe, Britain has been confronting the realities of global migration in this century. Which has presented challenges on multiple fronts at once for all of us, humanitarian, economic, political, cultural, legal, and many more. Every Western government has had to find some ways to respond to these in a way that lives up to our obligations to people in need of protection around the world, and to their obligations to their own citizens. And that has to mean, in part, working together, learning from each other, seeking some common ways forward.

The US and the UK, given all that we have in common, might particularly benefit from that kind of exchange of ideas. And that's the sort of conversation that we hope to be starting today. As Britain's home secretary, Suella Braverman is the UK is leading policymaker on this front, as well as in related areas like law enforcement, crime, and much of what we here in America would call Homeland Security. She's in Washington this week to meet with senior administration officials, with members of Congress, and others, on the full range of issues in her home office purview, but especially the refugee and global migration dilemma. And we're very pleased that she could take some time to offer us her thoughts on those challenges today. She will speak for 30 minutes or so, then we'll have a brief discussion, and a few questions in the room. And with that, Home Secretary, the floor is yours.

Suella Braverman: Thank you very much for the welcome. It is always a great pleasure to be here in America. And it's a particular privilege to be speaking at the American Enterprise Institute, an organization that has contributed so much to the intellectual foundations of the conservative movement in the US and the UK, and to our public life more broadly. Some of those affiliated with AEI have had a significant impact on my own thinking. Thomas Sowell, James Q. Wilson, Justice Scalia, and Britain's Sir Roger Scruton, who was a visiting scholar here for several years.

Now I'm here in America to talk about a critical and shared global challenge, uncontrolled and illegal migration. It's an existential challenge for the political and cultural institutions of the West. Just as it's a basic rule of history, that nations which cannot defend their borders will not long survive. It is a basic rule of politics, that political systems which cannot control their borders will

not maintain the consent of the people, and thus not long endure. You do not have to be a clairvoyant to see how might this all unfold.

To understand the future, cast your mind back a couple of weeks, and a few thousand miles southeast of here, to the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa, population then 6,000. Lampedusa, where in a 24-hour period, beginning on the 12th of September, over 120 boats, over 120, 100 boats, carrying more than 5,000 illegal migrants, made the 100-mile crossing from Tunisia in Africa to Italy. Within 48 hours, illegal arrivals outnumbered the local population. And a state of emergency had been declared. By the 20th of September, at least 11,000 had landed, with migrants sleeping in the street, stealing food, and clashing with the police. These 11,000 are part of the estimated 133,000 people who've already come to Italy illegally by sea in the first six months of this year. That number is almost double the number of arrivals at the same point in 2022. And in 2022, a total of 330,000 illegal border crossings into the EU were detected, an increase of 66 percent compared to 2021.

Of course, it's worth noting that most numbers relating to illegal migration are approximations. Nobody knows the true number of illegal arrivals, and estimates in this area very rarely turn out to be lower. America faces similar challenges. Thousands of people illegally cross the border on a daily basis. Illegal migration to the US has in recent years gone from just under 2 million in 2021, to more than 2.8 million this year. Illegal migration is not merely an event driven or cyclical problem, it's a permanent and structural challenge for the developed nations in general and the West in particular.

Unless we act, it will only worsen in the years to come. War, political instability, and climate change will of course, exacerbate migration flows. According to the UN, at the end of 2022, there were over 108 million forcibly displaced people globally, with 29 million considered to be refugees by the UNHCR. But we must be honest. The fundamental drivers of this epoch defining challenge are economics and demography.

In January, the World Economic Forum said that migration will become one of the top five global risks in the next decade, ahead of national resource crisis, geoeconomic confrontation, and environmental disasters. It's a fallacy that as countries get richer, emigration from them declines. As the American economist Michael Clemens has found, emigration from a country tends to rise until it reaches a level of income of about \$10,000 per person, before declining. World Bank data show that more than 3 billion people live in countries where the average income is below this threshold. The potential for migration to

increase yet further is truly colossal. The raw numbers show how demand for migration, legal or otherwise, is likely to surge in the coming years. So, too, does personal testimony. A 2021 Gallup Poll found that 16 percent of adults worldwide, around 900 million people, would like permanently to leave their own country. And those numbers are not evenly distributed around the world. Thirty seven percent of people living in sub-Saharan Africa, some 481 million people, and 27 percent of those living in the Middle East and North Africa, around 156 million, say they'd like to migrate.

The ease with which some of them might reach Europe poses a unique and deepening challenge. The fact is that our countries are exceptionally attractive. Four percent of those polled by Gallup, approximately 14 million people, named Britain as their preferred destination. Eighteen percent, approximately 162 million people, named the USA. These numbers are respectively more than half of our current total populations. Now, those in favor of a more liberal approach when it comes to legal migration tend to say at this point, so what? Isn't it a good thing that people the world over want to come to the West and contribute? And why can't we absorb and welcome them? And wouldn't the problem of illegal migration be significantly reduced if we made it easier for people to come to our countries legally? Well, there are four core arguments in opposition to uncontrolled and illegal migration, the civic argument, the practical argument, the security argument, and the democratic argument.

Firstly, the civic argument against uncontrolled and illegal migration. I believe that the nation state is one of humanity's great civilizing forces. It creates a shared identity and a shared purpose. And that does not need to have a racial component. Typically, it binds people of different racial backgrounds together. Far from being an ugly emotion, patriotism stirs people to heroism, and to kindness. It is the belief that we have specific obligations to others, precisely because they are our fellow countrymen. And in order for nationality to be sustainable, economically, culturally, and in terms of public support, it needs to encompass everyone. That, in turn, means that the country cannot grow exponentially, and still maintain the harmony needed for everyone to feel that we are all in this together. And let's remember something that is all too often forgotten, integration inevitably takes time. If immigration is uncontrolled, it makes it harder for society to adapt and accommodate new cultures and customs, and for communities to meld together.

Uncontrolled immigration, inadequate integration, and a misguided dogma of multiculturalism have proven a toxic combination for Europe over the last few decades. I'm not the first to point this out. In 2010, Angela Merkel gave a

speech in which she acknowledged that multiculturalism had utterly failed. And then French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and British Prime Minister David Cameron, echoed similar sentiments shortly thereafter. Multiculturalism makes no demands of the incomer to integrate. It has failed, because it allowed people to come to our society, and live parallel lives in it. They could be in the society, but not of the society. And in extreme cases, they could pursue lives aimed at undermining the stability and threatening the security of our society. We are living with the consequences of that failure today, you can see it play out in the streets all over Europe. From Malmo, to Paris, Brussels to Leicester. It is 13 years since Merkel gave her speech. And I'm not sure that very much has changed since.

If people are not able to settle in our countries, and start to think of themselves as British, American, French, or German, then something is going badly wrong. National identity is not something invented in an ivory tower, or by advertising executives. The nation state has endured because it means something real to almost all of us. And that is true the world over. Given how much it matters, it must be protected. Saying so does not make one anti-immigrant, nor does it mean you're anti-immigration. I am the child of immigrants. And it's no betrayal of my parents' story to say that immigration must be controlled. There is an optimal level of immigration. It is not zero. But there has been more migration to the UK and Europe in the last 25 years than in all the time that went before. It has been too much too quick, with too little thought given to integration and the impact on social cohesion. And the fact that the optimal level is hard to define, and will vary across time and for different countries, doesn't change that fundamental fact. Nor should it blind us from the simple truth. If cultural change is too rapid and too big, then what was already there is diluted. Eventually it will disappear.

Secondly, the practical argument against uncontrolled and illegal migration. The unprecedented rise in illegal migration to the UK via small boat crossings from France has put unsustainable pressure on the UK asylum system and the British taxpayer. Approximately, 109,000 people have illegally crossed the channel via small boats since 2018, including 45,000 alone last year. Consequently, the cost of the UK asylum system has roughly doubled in the last year, and now stands at nearly £4 billion. A decade ago, the total cost to the taxpayer was around £500 million. The UK is now spending £8 million a day on accommodating migrants in hotels. And we are not unique in these challenges, of course. In March, roughly one third of all hotel rooms in Ireland were being used to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees. And New York

City is accommodating some 40,000 migrants in hotels. Earlier this month, New York's Democratic Mayor, Eric Adams, exclaimed that the migrants crisis will destroy New York City. Recent analysis suggests that it will cost New York approximately \$10 billion annually to support the roughly 110,000 asylum seekers, who have arrived there after crossing the southern border this year.

Unless countries can prevent or rapidly remove illegal migrants, pressures on the state will compound over time. Accommodation cannot be magicked out of thin air. Nor can new schools, improved roads, extra police officers, additional health care, or any of the other public services upon which people rely. Immigration is behind at least 45 percent of demand for new housing in England. More than one in five births are to foreign born mothers. Due to immigration and high birth rates among foreign born mothers, English secondary schools will need to find an extra 213,000 places by 2026 compared to 2020. And then of course, there are the direct financial costs. A 2014 study by University College London concluded that almost no illegal migrants end up paying in taxes what they gained from the state in benefits.

Thirdly, the national security case against uncontrolled and illegal migration. Illegal migration also poses obvious threats to public safety and national security. UK police chiefs have warned me of heightened levels of criminality connected to some small boat arrivals, particularly in relation to drug crime, exploitation, and prostitution. People who choose to come across the channel illegally from another safe country have already shown contempt for our laws. President Macron claimed that illegal migrants or those waiting for a residence permit accounted for more than half of crime in Paris. Illegal migration is increasingly a tool exploited by hostile states and those acting on their behalf. Vladimir Putin weaponized migration in 2021, sending thousands of asylum seekers via Belarus to try to cross into Poland and Lithuania. In March, Italy's defense minister said the exponential increase in the migratory phenomenon departing from African shores is also to a not insignificant extent, part of a clear strategy of hybrid warfare that the Wagner division is implementing, using its considerable weight in some African countries.

And fourthly, and perhaps most critically, the democratic case against uncontrolled and illegal migration. Opinion polls and successive national votes could not be clearer. People the world over want their governments to control their borders. The British public backed the UK-Rwanda partnership and the government's recent Illegal Migration Act by margins of about two to one. Six in 10 in red wall seats support stopping migrants' small boats from illegally

entering the UK by using any means necessary. Seventy-two percent of EU citizens are in favor of reinforcing EU external borders. And more than half of Americans said there was an invasion at the southern border when polled in August 2022.

Who we allow to come into our country and become one of us is a fundamental issue. Without public consent, immigration is illegitimate. Dismissing as idiots or bigots, those members of the public who express legitimate concerns, is not merely unfair, it is dangerous. Europe is at a critical juncture. The EU must find a way to meet the challenge of illegal migration. Ursula von der Leyen's recent visit to Lampedusa demonstrates the Commission's recognition of the severity of the situation. Because failure to do so will, I fear, undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions and create the conditions for more extreme politics. The UK is working closely with our European allies, both on the continent and in joint efforts upstream, to combat the smuggling gangs and better secure Europe's borders. And we will always look for ways to deepen our cooperation on security. The most recent example is our new working arrangement with Frontex.

To address where the solution to all of this might lie, I must first broach a taboo. One of the most significant, but underappreciated factors contributing to the global migration crisis is the global asylum framework. By this, I mean the various well intentioned legal conventions and treaties that say in effect, if you are fleeing persecution somewhere, you are entitled to make a claim for asylum anywhere. And irrespective of whether you arrived illegally, or passed through multiple safe countries along the way, a country must consider it. According to the UN, an estimated 50,000 people have died attempting dangerous and illegal migration since 2014. Although the actual figure is almost certainly higher. About half of these deaths occurred while attempting to cross the Mediterranean. A thousand people died last year, trying to cross from Mexico to the US. And some 150 people have died attempting to cross the channel by small boat, lorry, or other clandestine means in the last five years.

All of these people were no doubt seeking a better life. Some, perhaps many, were genuine refugees. But not all of them were. Seeking asylum and seeking better economic prospects are not the same thing. Seeking refuge in the first safe country you reach, or shopping around for your preferred destination, are not the same thing. Being trafficked, i.e., transported against your will, perhaps to be sold into sex slavery, and being smuggled, i.e., asking someone to sneak you into a country, are not the same thing. The extent to which the global asylum framework enables the obscuring of these categories creates huge

incentives for illegal migration. This legal framework is rooted in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. It was created to help resettle people fleeing persecution following the horrors of World War Two and the Holocaust, and was initially, at least, centered around Europe. It was an incredible achievement of its age. But more than 70 years on, we now live in a completely different time.

Jet travel has transformed the cost and comparative ease of moving around the world. The internet has made people acutely aware of how different life is and how much higher wages are in other parts of the world. Smartphones enable smugglers to facilitate operations with great ease and smooth communication between those who have undertaken a journey and others who might like to. When the Refugee Convention was signed, it conferred protection on some 2 million people in Europe. According to analysis by Nick Timothy and Karl Williams for the Center for Policy Studies, it now confers the notional right to move to another country upon at least 780 million people. It is therefore incumbent upon politicians and thought leaders to ask whether the Refugee Convention and the way it has come to be interpreted through our courts, is fit for our modern age or in need of reform.

Article One of the Convention defines the term refugee as applying to those who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, cannot safely reside in the country of their nationality. Elsewhere, the Convention speaks of life or freedom being threatened. I think most members of the public would recognize those fleeing a real risk of death, torture, oppression, or violence as being in need of protection. However, as case law has developed, what we have seen in practice is an interpretive shift away from persecution, in favor of something more akin to a definition of discrimination. And there has been a similar shift away from a well-founded fear towards a credible or plausible fear. The practical consequence of which has been to expand the number of those who may qualify for asylum, and to lower the threshold for doing so. Let me be clear, there are vast swathes of the world where it is extremely difficult to be gay, or to be a woman. Where individuals are being persecuted, it is right that we offer sanctuary. But we will not be able to sustain an asylum system if in effect, simply being gay, or a woman, or fearful of discrimination in your country of origin, is sufficient to qualify for protection.

Article 31 of the Refugee Convention makes clear that it is intended to apply to individuals coming directly from a territory where their life was threatened. It also states, where people are crossing borders without permission, they should

present themselves without delay to the authorities, and must show good cause for any illegal entry. The UK, along with many others, including America, interpret this to mean that people should seek refuge and claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach. But NGOs and others, including the UN Refugee Agency, contest this. The status quo where people are able to travel through multiple safe countries, and even reside in safe countries for years, while they pick and choose their preferred destination to claim asylum is absurd and unsustainable. Nobody entering the UK by boat from France is fleeing imminent peril. None of them have good cause for illegal entry. The vast majority have passed through multiple other safe countries, and in some instances, have resided in safe countries for several years. There is a strong argument that they should cease to be treated as refugees during their onward movement.

There are also many whose journeys originate from countries that the public would consider to be manifestly safe like Turkey, or Albania, or India. In these instances, most are simply economic migrants, gaming the asylum system to their advantage. In Europe, we've added, through the European Convention on Human Rights, additional human rights laws. The global asylum framework is a promissory note that the West cannot fulfill. We have created a system of almost infinite supply, incentivizing millions of people to try their luck, knowing full well that we have no capacity to meet more than a fraction of the demand. Tragically, the ease with which this system can be gamed by those that don't really need it means it is the most vulnerable, women, children, those without the money to pay people smugglers, and those not fit enough to make arduous journeys, that lose out.

In the UK, roughly 70 percent of those arriving illegally on small boats are men aged under 40. This is a hypocritical position for the West to maintain. And by creating a market for people smuggling, it is leading to considerable human suffering. So why has the international community so far, collectively failed to explore any serious reform of the global asylum framework? I think there are two main reasons. The first is simply that it's very hard to renegotiate these instruments. If you think getting 27 EU member states to agree is difficult, try getting agreement at the United Nations. The second is much more cynical. The fear of being branded a racist or illiberal. Any attempt to reform the Refugee Convention will see you smeared as anti-refugee. Similar epithets are hurled at anyone who suggests reform of the ECHR or its court in Strasbourg. I reject the notion that a country cannot be expected to respect human rights if it is not signed up to an international human rights organization. As if the UK doesn't

have a proud history of human rights dating back to Magna Carta, and the ECHR is all that is holding us back from becoming Russia. America, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan seem to manage just fine.

None of this is particularly novel, nor should it be particularly controversial. As Home Secretary, Theresa May called for Britain to leave the ECHR, and it was Conservative Party policy under Michael Howard to leave the Refugee Convention. I'm merely advocating for reform. Now, while the underlying framework is both a contributing factor to the problem and a barrier to certain fixes, some countries have been more successful in tackling illegal migration than others. Australia had to cope with two major waves of illegal maritime migration across the Pacific in the last two decades. In the last wave, before they stopped the crossings, more than 52,000 unauthorized maritime arrivals and around 1100 deaths at sea, were recorded between 2008 and 2014. Operation Sovereign Borders saw migrant boats intercepted, and then those on board were either returned whence they had traveled, or taken to immigration detention centers in third countries. There were some 400 illegal boat crossings in 2013, the year the operation was enacted. Within a year, the problem was eliminated.

Denmark, between 2015 and 2016, announced a range of measures intended to make their asylum system significantly less attractive as a destination for illegal migration. The result was a reduction in claims from 21,000 in 2015, to 6000 in 2016, and 1500 in 2020. For every one asylum seeker that arrived in Denmark in 2021, three arrived in Sweden on a per capita basis. So unilateral and bilateral solutions and policies of deterrence can and do work. This is the route the UK has chosen to go down. In 2022, some 12,000 Albanians entered the UK illegally via small boat. In response, we strengthened how we worked with Albania, including improved data sharing, closer operational working, new expedited returns arrangements, and financial support. These measures have seen the number of Albanian small boat arrivals fall by 90 percent so far during 2023. We also work closely with France. Last year, the prime minister signed a historic bilateral agreement to deepen our cooperation in combating illegal migration. That included significant investment to increase frontline staffing and policing levels in northern France, better real time intelligence and data sharing, supported by embedded UK officers, and improved intelligence cooperation to increase disruptions, arrests, and prosecutions.

This sort of cooperation is necessary, but not sufficient in terms of results. Overall crossings are down more than 20 percent so far this year, compared with 2022. The system that we are working to deliver through our Illegal

Migration Act is one that, within the limitations of the broader rights-based framework, says the only route to asylum in the UK must be a safe and legal route. Anyone who enters the UK illegally will be deemed inadmissible to our asylum system, and following assessment, will be detained and swiftly removed to their home country if that's safe, or to a safe third country if not. In 2021, we signed our groundbreaking Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda. Under this agreement, Rwanda will accept physical and legal responsibility for illegal migrants relocated from the UK, and look after all their needs while their claims are considered, with a full package to support their integration into Rwandan society. We always knew that our partnership would be challenged in court, and we remain confident that the UK Supreme Court will uphold the legality of the scheme later this year, enabling us to start putting it into operation.

While our political opponents, NGOs, and others dismissed the partnership as an immoral gimmick when it was first announced, it is striking how many countries run by governments of varying political hues have now expressed, in public and in private conversations, their support for this model. Many are now pursuing variations of their own. The UK will continue to prioritize policies of deterrence and border hardening, alongside the maintenance of safe and legal routes. At the same time, we will look to build consensus for more fundamental reform of the asylum framework at the international level. The goal for reform must be to embed certain principles in the global asylum framework. Deterring illegal migration must be an aim. Countries must have a say in what volume of refugees they are capable of resettling each year. Support and protection should, to the fullest extent possible, be rendered in neighboring safe countries where it is most efficient to deliver, and able to reach those that need it most.

The only route to resettlement should be via safe and legal routes. People must claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. The definition of who qualifies for protection must be tightened. And policies of externalization, such as our partnership with Rwanda, must be recognized as appropriate. I don't accept the false choice between acting unilaterally or even bilaterally to protect one's border and solving this problem through multilateral cooperation. International cooperation is essential if we are to find enduring solutions to the challenges of global migration, and deliver an asylum framework fit for the modern age. But nations cannot simply sit on their hands while a reform of process plays out. It is right that they act in their national interest. I have, in recent weeks, been meeting with fellow interior ministers in Europe. I will continue doing so in the coming months, and hope to bring together partners to

a forum where we can begin discussing some of the matters that I've touched on today.

Is the Refugee Convention in need of reform? Would a revised global asylum framework work? And how would it look? How can we better balance national rights and human rights, so that the latter do not undermine national sovereignty? Could the ECHR be more transparent and accountable in how it interprets human rights, and give greater power to nation states to make arguments and present evidence? What are the appropriate criteria for being labeled a refugee these days in the 21st century? How can we stop human rights laws being gamed by smugglers? Are we delivering safe and legal routes in an efficient and effective manner? And while we may have different views as to the solutions, I hope we can at least agree on one thing, that we are living in a new world, bound by outdated legal models. It's time that we acknowledge that.

Thank you.